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ECONOMIC, SOCIAL AND CULTURAL RIGHTS

Written statement*/ submitted by Pax Christi International, International Catholic Peace Movement, a non-governmental organization in special consultative status

The Secretary-General has received the following written statement which is circulated in accordance with Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31.

[28 June 2001]

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*/ This written statement is issued, unedited, as received in English and French, from the submitting non-governmental organization(s).

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Peace for Burundi

The ongoing war in Burundi, the ensuing misery and the Arusha negotiations for establishing transitional institutions have greatly caught the attention of Pax Christi International. Above all, Pax Christi appreciates and promotes all the efforts and initiatives taken by many persons of good will working to lead this country to justice, peace, forgiveness and national reconciliation.

Facts and considerations

- Burundi's population is weighed down by 8 years of war, which have driven several of its sons and daughters to the brink of forced exile, and many more to poverty, misery and despair. This war is the result of social and political exclusion, which has characterized the management of public life since independence in 1962.
- The political elite changed the ethnic dimension into a tool they wielded to get and keep power. Ethnic fundamentalism became an ideology that resulted in explosive cycles of massacres and even genocides. Sustainable peace building and peacekeeping in Burundi must tackle the roots of the injustices caused by this ideology. Armed struggle, always leading to material destruction and the death of innocent victims, can only achieve short-lived victories. Active non-violence, which implies citizens' awareness of their rights and duties as well as the determination of each person to implement non-violent strategies, is highly advisable in order to re-humanise political action.
- The Peace Agreement, signed in Arusha by the parties in conflict on the 28 August 2000, is a tool that can help start the necessary reforms for a return to peace. The implementation process should not be delayed by long and useless debates. The Agreement must serve the immediate interests of the population. Nevertheless we must note that there hasn't been any substantial progress in the implementation of the Arusha Agreement in the last 8 months. On the contrary, in just the last few weeks, the attacks have intensified in the centre of the country. The Arusha negotiations will lead nowhere and a new catastrophe is eminent if the Burundese political actors don't change their behaviour.
- Pax Christi deplores the fact that the Burundese population has not yet had a say in the peace building process. The population needs to express itself on the reforms that must be implemented in order to win peace, justice and full development. The state's seizure of communications must now give way to an open debate in which all the organisations of civil society can take part.

Call

1. Pax Christi International urges the belligerent parties to conclude a ceasefire agreement as soon as possible. But the Peace Agreement will remain null and void if the financing and waging of war remain the first concerns of the country's elites. Burundi's population needs peace. It also needs to fully enjoy its rights: most importantly, the right to live. We ask the International Community to impose an arms embargo and sanctions against all individuals and legal entities that invest in the financing and the waging of war in Burundi.

2. Pax Christi International invites each political actor to be tolerant and participate in open dialogue by favouring the elements of unity and avoiding those of division and opposition.
3. Pax Christi International asks Burundi's military authorities to regard the armed opposition not as an implacable enemy to be killed, but as a partner within the process of a genuine peace. Taking power by force has never favoured the return to a sustainable peace. As far as the armed opposition is concerned, it is urged to concentrate its concerns on the negotiations aimed at immediately signing a ceasefire agreement.
4. Peace will remain a utopian dream if poverty and misery are not quickly reduced by an overall development strategy. Pax Christi International appeals for international solidarity to cancel Burundi's debt and allocate the amount of the debt to urgent projects of peaceful conflict prevention and resolution, food security, unemployment and underemployment reduction, reconstruction and social reintegration of displaced and repatriated persons.
5. Pax Christi International asks the International Community to favour the active participation of the Burundese society in the ongoing debates by setting up all the mechanisms necessary in order to easily arrange for negotiations in Burundi. A group of observers and a minimal protection force under UN leadership is necessary to set minds at rest, notably the essential actors who fled from Burundi for political reasons. The liberation of political prisoners should come within this consideration.
6. Pax Christi International asks the International Community to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Burundese refugees. The success of their reintegration will depend on the attention paid to the principles of equity and social justice.